

PT. BURWELL

1891 ACCOUNT BOOK REVIVES MEMORIES OF FORMER ERA

A. N. Wright, who operates a thriving and modern hardware business in Port Burwell retains a solid link with the past. He still carries on business in the store that was built by his father in 1899-1900 and he has in his possession the first account book that his father kept when he took possession of the original store, across the street from the present site, on May 14, 1891.

The account book, written in A. R. Wright's own hand, contains the original inventory of goods in the store, the accounts for each month and other inventories made in 1892 and 1894. This account book and the recollections that it inspires for Mr. Wright give a clear-cut picture of what life at the turn of the century was like.

Local history of this sort is becoming more and more difficult to track down. The evident reason is, of course, the thinning ranks of people with personal recollections of the pioneer days in this district but equally important is a lack of interest in the local past.

Actually such local records and minute observations of daily living habits provide the key of what life was actually like in that era which numerically is separated from ours by only 60 to 70 years, but scientifically is separated by the impassable gap of automobiles, aeroplanes, two world wars, atomic bombs and sputnik.

To take a look at that distant age is to take a look at a completely different way of life. And yet, that different way of life can be made understandable because there are still many men living who have passed through this entire progression and remember vividly the former era or who retain memories from what their parents told them. One of these is A. N. Wright. He is a man vitally interested in the present affairs of his community, having served as reeve of Port Burwell for three years, as president of the Port Chamber of Commerce and as a member of the Bayham Township Council. But despite these present interests, Mr. Wright finds time to think about the past too.

Alma Richard Wright, his father, was born in 1856, the year that word about the battle of Alma finally reached North America. Prior to taking up the hardware business in Port Burwell he had travelled about the country selling tin sets, made by his brother and himself. The five-piece tin sets consisted of 14 and 10-quart pails, milk strainer, dipper and cream skimmer and the exorbitant cost of such a set was one dollar.

In 1891 A. R. Wright was selling door-to-door around Frogett's Corners and stayed overnight at the hotel there. The proprietor suggested that he set up a permanent business in Port Burwell and he did. The account book outlines that business.

His son explains that cash receipts outlined in the account book bear very little relationship to the actual situation. Trading was done in kind and the Wright storage cellar was always piled high with farm produce received for goods "Whitehorses" or "due-bills" from the local grocery store accounted for another good portion of the business so that although the accounts record a business striving to make receipts match expenditures the actual standard of living was high. The total inventory of the store in 1891 was worth \$228.65; by 1892 it had doubled to \$569.76 and two years later it neared the thousand dollar mark. But the cash balances for many months show the scarcity of hard cash as monthly profits often hovered near the three-dollar mark and several times expenditures exceeded cash received.

In 1899 the original business was destroyed by fire as a general blaze destroyed Port Burwell's main street from the bridge across the Otter to the East beach. Some 65 houses and businesses were destroyed. The next year A. R. Wright moved across the street to his present position, building the south half of the store in 1899 and the north section in 1900. The business made almost everything it sold and covered a great market area from Clear Creek on the east to Grovesend and Calton on the west and Griffin Corners on the north.

PORT BURWELL BUILDING REMOVAL APPROVED

Village council Monday night passed a bylaw to permit cottage owners to move their buildings from leased beach front land. The property has been sold to the Ontario government.

A delegation of 12 cottagers attended the meeting asking for permission to move the buildings, which are valued at up to \$7,000. About 100 cottage-owners are affected.

Mrs. Irma Travis of Port Burwell, said she sold the land to the government last fall for \$125,000. About 210 acres are involved, including a beach, park and farm. The acreage will be developed as a provincial park.

All leases will expire at the end of 1968, according to Mrs. Travis. Most are five year leases.

Cottagers have been notified that they must move when their leases terminate.



BAYHAM COMMUNITIES BUSY IN 1901

Besides giving a comprehensive review of the commercial and manufacturing industries of Tillsonburg, the trade edition published 55 years ago by the Tillsonburg Observer also gave coverage surrounding business centres.

VIENNA was one of the communities covered and with great interest we took note of the fact that this flourishing business centre had a good-sized planing mill, sash and door factory, grist and woollen mills, a number of good stores and a first-class hotel. It was known for "the good fishing to be had here", and for "quail shooting".

One of the principal establishments of the town was the saw and planing mill, sash and door factory, run by H. Z. Balcom. He also kept a furniture warehouse and did picture-framing and repairing of all kinds besides doing undertaking in all its branches and selling a good stock of funeral supplies.

The woollen mills were operated by S.S. Clutton. Everything in the line of tweeds, sheeting and hosiery of all kinds was kept in stock. Farmers who desired woollen goods turned out or wished to exchange wool for manufactured goods could do so here.

A bakery was run by John Brown with ice cream parlors in connection. He also opened, at that time, a choice line of groceries and a fine line of canned goods.

John Hawkins was the proprietor of the grist mill and enjoyed good patronage.

One of the best country hotels in the county and one of the oldest was "The Stillwell House" situated here. M. Peats was the new proprietor of it. He also had good stabling accommodations and conducted a livery.

STRAFFORDVILLE, described as one of the neatest of the numerous hamlets on the line of the Tillsonburg and Port Burwell railway, at that time was a bustling hive of industry, with a good sized cheese factory, several stores, post office, blacksmith shop, saw mill, and one of the best country hotels in the province. Hubbard House, the hotel, had Thos. Gordon of Port Rowan as its new proprietor. Splendid stabling accommodations, too could be had here.

One of the best equipped general stores in the place was conducted by Wakeling Bros. They dealt in dry goods, groceries, boots and shoes, patent medicines and handled all kinds of agricultural machinery. They ran an agency for the Dominion Express and kept the Post Office too, and had the Bell Telephone central office in their establishment.

^SCawell & Murphy were engaged in the hardware, stove and tinsmithing business. They carried a good stock and did a good trade, and took in eave-troughing work, and sold flour and feed as well.

In addition to horseshoeing, William Lipsit did woodwork of all kinds, buggies and wagons a speciality, and offered repair services. To accommodate an increasing trade, he extended his buildings and made them three times their former size.

A saw mill business was run by Moses Stratton, who manufactured shingles and did custom sawing.

EDEN, then known as a thriving little hamlet, had a saw and grist mill, a temperance house post office, two blacksmith shops and two stores.

One of the general stores was run by Leach Bros. They kept everything in the line of dry goods, groceries, ready-made clothing, boots and shoes, paints and oils, also a good line of hardware.

Eden

The other general store was conducted by John Patton. He, too, kept everything in the line of groceries, boots and shoes, as well as dry goods.

The leading blacksmith and horseshoer was J. D. Adams. Besides understanding the proper shoeing of horses, he was known to cure all defects caused by improper shoeing.

PORT BURWELL, one of the prettiest summer resorts on the lake, was a bustling place then.

Among the leading business places were the firm of Emery, Poustie & Co., which was one of the largest stores with a general stock of dry goods, gents' furnishings, fruits, flour and feed being sold. They also operated a large roller process grist mill and did extensive trade in this as well.

The bakery was conducted by E. Wilson, and he made a specialty of baking wedding cakes.

Prominent among the business houses too, was the hardware establishment of A. R. Wright, who was in business for eight years. He carried everything in the line of heavy and shelf hardware, and did all kinds of repairing of tinware.

A confectionery store with ice cream parlors in connection was run by Levi Lewis.

The blacksmith was F. W. Young who was in business for 15 years. He was known to cure lameness caused by improper shoeing.

A manufacturer of harness was E. J. Buchner, all of which was hand made. He kept a stock of heavy and light harness as well as brushes, whips, rugs, robes and horsemen's supplies.

Engaged in the drug and grocery business was G. B. McConnell. Here patent medicines and perfumery was sold and prescriptions carefully compounded. He kept a fine range of groceries in stock, garden seeds, paints and wallpaper, besides carrying a full line of spectacles and doing picture frame repairing. He also was an issuer of marriage licenses.

One of the leaders in dry goods, boots and shoes, newest fabrics, gent's furnishings, hats and caps was D. F. Williams. He also sold groceries.

Tailor and cutter in the village was S. T. Logan, in business for almost 20 years.

A dealer in hardware and furniture was G.F.Williams, with paints, oils and varnishes cutlery and house supplies among the stock in his store. He sold furniture and did repairing in furniture and tinware.

The two hotels were The Commercial Hotel and Erie Hotel. Mr. Van Order was the landlord of the former hotel, and William Gordon the owner of the latter.

BY J. P. HATCH

I had been convalescing at the home of my sister in Detroit, after a long and rather trying siege in the Toronto General Hospital.

One evening about 8:30, as I was thinking of retiring for the night, my sister, coming in from the garage said:

"Come, John, get your coat and crutches, we are going out to the airport to see the planes come in."

Anticipating another pleasant drive, I was soon ready and seated in a luxurious eight cylinder car, and we were off. As we rode along and could hear no sound from the motor, it seemed we were being propelled by some magic force. This illusion was confirmed as the automatically controlled lights gave or withheld permission, to cross streets as we wove in and out of the constant stream of traffic composed of other cars whose passengers, bent on business or pleasure, were evidently in a hurry to get it over with, like getting a tooth pulled.

I suppose we drove eight or ten miles across the city, at least we were about twenty minutes on the way, when we finally stopped and parked the car along with possibly 200 others, facing an immense field which was surrounded by a high steel fence. This field, which appeared to be a mile long and possibly as wide, seemed to be entirely covered with cement pavement. Locking the car, we went around to the offices which opened on the field. In a few minutes a metallic voice above our heads announced loudly, that a plane from New York and Buffalo would arrive in five minutes.

Within three minutes a boy standing near us sang out:

"Here she comes" and looking off towards the east we saw a cluster of red and green lights floating towards us through the darkness. The plane, with colored lights on its wings, skimmed gracefully past, landed and rolled back to within a few feet of where we stood.

A colored porter in uniform, wheeled a set of steps up to a door in the body of the huge machine, and one by one 12 men descended from the interior. A tank loaded with gasoline came alongside and pumped the plane's tanks full of fuel, and in a few minutes 11 other men strolled into the maw of the giant. The voice over our heads was again heard announcing:

"Plane leaving in two minutes for Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City and San Francisco."

Promptly in two minutes the twin motors began to hum and soon the monster started crawling away gaining speed as it went, the wind from its propellers nearly blowing us away. In less than a minute it was off the ground and we watched the twinkling lights for perhaps two minutes more, when they disappeared in the distance as the plane headed for Chicago, nearly 300 miles away, where it was due to arrive in two and a half hours.

When we started for home my brother-in-law switched on the radio, and we were entertained by Bob Burns and his cohorts in Hollywood. We halted on the way long enough for my sister to run into a store. She soon returned with huge cones of the most delicious ice cream.

As we proceeded towards home, listening to delightful music, eating this nectar from the gods, and riding in a magic chariot, I musingly remarked to Mack:

"Is not this a wonderful age we are living in?"

"Yes", he replied, as he swerved the car quickly to avoid being run down by a truck, "yes, it sure is".

When we had retired for the night I lay awake for some time, my mind running back over the years to when I was a boy. I did not count the years, but thought of when I was the baby of the family, and how glad I was when my younger brother was born and I graduated from what, to me, was a very undignified position. I started to school when I was five years old, but as we had two miles to walk I missed school on stormy days, so though I had an early start, my education did not develop very rapidly, and as I continued missing more or less throughout my school life my education never did reach a very high standing.

I think I was about eight years old when one of the officials of the Sunday School, which my brothers, and I attended religiously every Sunday, rain or shine, conceived the brilliant idea that the school should have a picnic at Port Burwell. Some thought it was too far to go, but once the school was inoculated with the suggestion it spread like the measles, and the more it was discussed the more it grew until all opposition was overcome.

Charlie Johnston, as every one called our superintendent, (I think he is a lawyer in Detroit now, but I understand the set of red whiskers, which was his most outstanding facial adornment at that time, have disappeared), Mrs. Howey, Julia Allemand and Mrs. Buckburrough, were appointed a committee to make all arrangements. One thing that needed no attention by the committee was the supplying of food for those who attended. It was always a foregone conclusion that when a picnic was held, every wife and mother would provide refreshments enough for her family and a few more, so that if some person should be there who was so unfortunate that he had no one to provide for him, he would not need to go home hungry.

The work of the committee was almost exclusively centered in trying to devise some scheme for transporting the members of the school the 16 miles to the lake.

After considerable discussion, it was finally arranged that my father take his young gray team, for which he had a new harness and wagon, and build a rack with seats running lengthwise, one on each side. Then another span of horses were promised to hitch ahead, making a four horse team. Mr. Allemand was to take his three seated democrat wagon and carry all he could besides his own family. Ebenezer Buchner, Sam Howey and the blacksmith were to drive their own buggies.

As this was over 50 years ago, there no automobiles and bicycles, and very few people had buggies, of even the old open type. The blacksmith, Bill Buckburrough, was the only person in the section to own a "top" buggy.

I well remember Mr. Buchner's buggy. It was a very high-wheeled affair, with a round-backed body set very high on the springs. It was evidently the builder's idea that the user would like a good view of the country as he drove along in it. He drove an old white horse which was always fat, but which had a wart on its side as big as a large apple. Mr. Buchner was an old man and lame, but he managed in some way to clamber aboard this lofty craft every Sunday at least, for he was my Sunday School teacher and was never absent once that I can remember.

At last the eventful day arrived and we were all at the church in good time in the morning. The extra team was waiting, as also were some 30 children and adults. Some of the children who came had never been to any Sunday school, and a few belonged to the school of another denomination. This was the cause of considerable discussion by the committee, as well as members of the school. Chet Buckburrough, his older brother, Bert, and Herb Howey were about ready to lick two Baptist boys and three outsiders in an honest effort to discourage them from going, when Mr. Bennett, the day school teacher, intervened and so avoided any blood being shed.

Meanwhile the decorations had been put in place and the wagon loaded with its cargo of human freight. Two standards were set up, one at each end of the wagon, between which was stretched a banner on which someone had painted the words (Eden Sunday School). Then streamers were attached to the outside of the bridle of each horse, all of which impressed we youngsters as being grand. The seats were upholstered with buffalo robes and horse blankets.

Amid considerable squabbling not a few punches passed between the boys, and a few caustic remarks by the older ones, about the bringing of some people's children, the conveyance was finally loaded, and by some miracle all were able to get in, with the baskets being tucked under the seats.

At last, amid cheers and yells, the picnic was on its way. Between the howling of the children and the streamers on the bridles, the horses became frightened and undertook to get away from it all and for a few minutes the drivers had all they could do to quiet them. The jolting of the farm wagon, which had no springs, soon shook the load together as it rattled along as quietly as if they were accustomed to hauling a menagerie, the horses were soon under control. The buggies had gone ahead over the rough road, which was a good thing for them as they were out of the dust which was being kicked up by our four horses.

When we reached the crossroads leading to Mr. Allemand's place, he was there waiting with his democrat, and as he had one empty seat, my mother, her sister, Mrs. Mitchell, and Ann Meadows, with their baskets and my baby brother, climbed over the wheel out of the wagon and got in the democrat. There baskets were put under their seat and covered with a horse blanket to keep the sand out. The space in the wagon made by their removal was instantly filled by some who had been standing until then.

While the transfer of passengers was being made several boys had jumped out of the wagon and filled their pockets with stones from a pile of gravel beside the road, to be used as we drove along to throw at dogs, squirrels or birds. Usually when a boy would rise to his feet to throw a stone, a lurch of the wagon would swing him off balance, pitching him into someone's lap, or at least knocking someone's hat askew. Often in the rebound he would land on some other boy's foot, which would immediately start a fight.